

Chairing A Meeting The Most Effective Way

Chairing an effective meeting is a skill. One that is learnable. Outlined below are some simple principles; which if followed can result in focused efficient meetings where everyone feels their opinion is valued and the job gets done.

Rule 1

There is no place for ego. As the Chair Person you are the facilitator, the most effective are those who listen, who use open ended questions to tease out reasoning and to involve others.

Rule 2

Be very clear about what is the purpose of the meeting. Do you want lots of ideas to brainstorm possibilities, identify the implications of things already identified, broad-brush strokes or determining detail?

Rule 3

Be prepared, create the agenda, have any supporting papers prepared and circulated in plenty of time so that others have time to read in advance

Rule 4

At the beginning of the meeting ensure that all parties are introduced, keep it snappy. Set out clearly what sort of introduction is required: name and role, or background information. Give the time scale e.g. "Please introduce yourself give a brief outline of your experience, no more than a minute."

Rule 5

Set explicit parameters for the meeting from the outset: "By the end of the meeting we need to have achieved. We are going to concentrate on principles today so save the specific detail for the moment"

Rule 6

Have high expectations. If the meeting is due to start at 10.00am start on the dot who ever are there, they will get the message. Start late to accommodate late- comers and they will assume it is ok to come late. Be clear about end times too. If you have asked colleagues to read materials before the meeting don't read them out. The next time you ask them to read beforehand they will assume it is not worth the effort. Have high expectations and stick to them.

Rule 7

What ever decisions are agreed at the meeting MUST STAND. If you are unsure about their validity set up as a pilot with an end time agreed. Don't put the decision up for grabs if you are not happy to run with the outcome. You can give a structure for decisions which make it absolutely clear what is open to negotiation and what is up not.

Rule 8

Involve all parties. Ask questions to specific people if they are not taking an active part in the proceedings, "What do you think about?" If others are dominating value their contribution but involve others "Thank you that's very helpful, what do the rest of you think about what has offered?"

Rule 9

Keep the meeting on track, identify how things will be recorded, summarize the discussion, identify points for action, who will do what, the time scale for action, how things will be monitored and by whom and when

Rule 10

Model good meeting behaviour and accept nothing less from colleagues. Taking a positive part in the activity, being generous with ideas, listening to others, no aggression, bullying. A healthy professional discussion where diversity of ideas and approaches are constructively used to create the best solution and not as personal attacks is the ideal.

If colleagues are going to give of their best they need to know that all contributions are valued, that they will get credit for their ideas and that the whole organizations is strengthened by the collective success rather than scoring points off one another. As Chair Person it is you who will set the tone and manage the process.